

Playful Prairie Dog

Prairie dogs are rodents and members of the squirrel family. Five different species live in colonies across North America's grasslands and shrub lands of the Great Plains. Prairie dog towns may contain hundreds of prairie dogs. The animals dig underground tunnels connected to chambers, such as sleeping rooms and nurseries. The tunnels go down about 30 feet and can be 50 feet from one entrance to another. Prairie dogs are most active during the cool hours of daylight. Most of their time is spent eating. They also like to visit and groom each other. Prairie dogs have an advanced communication system.

The spring and summer months can be a challenging time for prairie dogs and their ecosystems. After having an average of 3 to 5 pups in the spring, prairie dogs become active and begin exploring their ecosystem. You might see them playing, eating, and communicating with each other. Outdoor activities for humans and urban sprawl also tend to increase during the warm months. Overcrowding means prairie dogs are apt to move to new locations, potentially getting lost, stuck, and finding themselves placed in danger. Prairie dogs living on land that is earmarked for development, if not humanely relocated by the responsible party, are often bulldozed to death, trapped, buried alive, and risk being poisoned.

On the other hand, prairie dogs are quite harmful to many farmers and ranchers. Horses can fall into holes dug by prairie dogs and break their legs. Once a horse's leg is broken it cannot recover and the horse will die. Prairie dogs are also known to dig up gardens and crops that farmers work hard to maintain. Although prairie dogs breed relatively slowly in comparison to other rodents, their communities never stop growing.

Do farmers and developers have a right to be upset with prairie dogs? What ideas do you have to help manage the prairie dog population? What are ways to relocate prairie dog communities in a humane way?